Ghost of Kyiv

The **Ghost of Kyiv** (Ukrainian: Привид Києва, romanized: *Pryvyd Kyieva*)[1] is the nickname given to a disputed MiG-29 Fulcrum flying ace credited with shooting down six Russian planes over Kyiv during the Kyiv offensive on 24 February 2022. According to the Security Service of Ukraine, he has shot down 10 Russian jets as of 27 February. Although not confirmed to be real, the Ghost of Kyiv has been credited as a morale booster for Ukrainians.

Ghost of Kyiv	
Allegiance	Ukraine
Service/branch	Ukrainian Air Force
Battles/wars	• Russo-Ukrainian War ◦ 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine ▪ Kyiv Offensive

Background and claims

Ukrainian Air Force MiG-29 in 2018. A similar plane is credited to the Ghost of Kyiv.

On 24 February 2022, Russia formally invaded Ukraine in an escalation of a pre-existing war between the two countries. During the Kyiv offensive, which began on the first day of the invasion, videos on social media began widely circulating of fighter jets in Ukraine shortly after the invasion started, including claims of a single pilot who took down multiple Russian jets.[2][3] A pilot of a MiG-29, nicknamed the "Ghost of Kyiv" by Ukrainians, was claimed to have won six air fights in the sky of Kyiv during the first 30 hours of the invasion.[1][4] The six planes are reported as two Su-35s, two Su-25s, a Su-27 and a MiG-29.[5][6][7] If the ace does exist, they would be the first recorded fighter ace of the 21st century.[8]

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence claimed that, should the downings be confirmed, the Ghost of Kyiv could be one of dozens of experienced pilots of military reserve who urgently returned to the Armed Forces of Ukraine after Russia invaded.[9] In a tweet, it referred to the Ghost of Kyiv as "the air avenger".[10] However, in a claim by Ukrainian commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi, he said he could only confirm a total of six Russian planes downed on the first day of fighting in Ukraine, though there may have been more.[4]

Former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko posted a tweet of a photograph of a fighter pilot, claiming it to be the Ghost of Kyiv, who Poroshenko said was real.[11][12] The photo was later discovered to have been reused from a Ministry of Defence post from 2019 showing a pilot testing a new helmet.[13] On 27 February, the Security Service of Ukraine said in a Facebook post that the Ghost of Kyiv has shot down 10 aircraft.[14]

Legacy

Fan art of the Ghost of Kyiv

Although some sources consider the Ghost of Kyiv to be an urban legend or war propaganda, its status has nevertheless been credited as a major morale boost for the Ukrainian population to bolster optimism in spite of the Russian invasion.[15][2][16] The claims are likely not a deliberate creation,[4] with the stories being shared by regular Ukrainian people on social media before official Ukrainian media accounts alluded to the pilot in a regular update.[10]

Computer-generated footage of the Ghost of Kyiv winning a dogfight was made using the 2013 video game *Digital Combat Simulator* and uploaded by a YouTube user. The uploader stated in the description that the footage was not real and was merely a tribute urging the Ghost of Kyiv, real or fake, to keep fighting. This video was shared by the official Twitter account of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.[4] The video subsequently went viral on social media, with Snopes saying that the circulating video was miscaptioned.[17][18]

Task & Purpose argued that while it was highly unlikely there were even six air-to-air takedowns in total, given their rarity in the 21st century and Ukraine's strong missile defense, the Ghost of Kyiv was "real enough" as the spirit of the Ukrainians.[15] Tom Demerly of *The Aviationist* argued that the Ghost of Kyiv is an "example of bizarre distortions ... amplified by the chaos of war".[19]

Similar to the Ghost of Kyiv, on 26 February 2022, social media reports emerged of a Ukrainian ground forces soldier dubbed the "Ukrainian Reaper", who supposedly killed over twenty Russian soldiers in combat alone.[20]

See also

- Angels of Mons – World War I fiction and accidental hoax
- Colonel Tomb – Flying ace

- Juba (sniper) – Iraqi sniper
- Lei Feng – Chinese soldier and propaganda icon (1940–1962)
- Pérák, the Spring Man of Prague – Figure from Czechoslovakian folklore

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